

EOU goes ‘test-blind’ to benefit incoming students

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University no longer requires standardized test results for financial aid.

The change the La Grande-based university implemented benefits incoming students and their families, especially those from marginalized communities. The university now will determine scholarships and merit-based awards based on students’ grades rather than ACT or SAT scores.

Genesis Meaderds, the school’s admissions director, said in a press release that becoming test-blind makes EOU’s admissions process smoother and easier to navigate for prospective students.

“EOU has been test-optional for years for admissions,” Meaderds said. “The challenge was that we never were test-optional for scholarships and financial aid, so students were being admitted, and then if they didn’t have SATs or ACTs on file they were ineligible for many merit-based scholarships.”

Meaderds met with a committee of university staff — Director of Financial Aid Sandy Henry, the Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness Holly Chason, Vice President for Student Affairs Lacy Karpilo and Assistant Athletic Director Mary Barnett — for a year to discuss the change.

The group reviewed studies that found evidence of racial and socioeconomic bias in standardized tests. Test anxiety or learning differences also can impact students’ ability to perform in this setting. The committee also found a student’s high school grade point average is actually the best indicator of college success.

“Through EOU’s internal analysis on incoming students,” University spokesperson Vicky Hart explained, “high school GPA remained the strongest predictor of student success, as defined by year-over-year retention, even after controlling for other variables including but not limited to gender, age, race/ethnicity, income and standardized test scores.”

Hart said the committee submitted its recommendations to

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Dick Mason/The Observer

Shaun Halladay, a volunteer leader for Return to Bethlehem, talks to people who will be assisting with the program on Monday, Nov. 30, 2020 in the basement of Market Place Fresh Foods, La Grande. The program opens Saturday, Dec. 5, and includes COVID-19 safety measures.

The Road to Bethlehem

Church group offers guided tours beginning Saturday

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Fifteen stair steps, 2,000 years.

Stepping back in time and into a re-creation of the world in which Jesus Christ was born will be as easy on Saturday, Dec. 5, as walking down the 15 steps leading to the basement of Market Place Fresh Foods, La Grande.

The spacious Fresh Foods basement, normally not open to the public, will be the site of a free interactive program, Return to Bethlehem. Those taking the trip back in time will walk a short route simulating what it would have been like for Mary and Joseph and others to trek the 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. People participating in the guided walks will encounter some of what Mary and Joseph did, including impatient Roman soldiers asking for identification, a shepherd talking to an angel, shopkeepers and the appearance



Dick Mason/The Observer

This photo on Monday, Nov. 30, 2020, shows one of the displays visitors will see in the Return to Bethlehem walking tour in the basement of Market Place Fresh Foods, La Grande. The program opens Saturday, Dec. 5, and includes COVID-19 safety measures.

of the Magi.

Local performers will portray all the characters, said Shaun Halladay of La Grande, a volunteer leader of the program, which also features facades of shops,

a model of a fire that crackles, large video images of flocks of sheep, a realistic cutout of a donkey and much more.

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Brown releases state budget proposal

Oregon would require lots of help from Congress

By Sara Cline
Associated Press/Report for America

SALEM — In a year where Oregon has weathered a global pandemic that has killed more than 900 residents, forest fires that ravaged 1 million acres and ongoing protests in the state’s largest city, Gov. Kate Brown’s budget proposal attempts to mitigate the effects of the turmoil.

The Democrat’s 2021-2023 proposed budget and policy agenda, which she released Tuesday, Dec. 1, relies heavily on securing additional coronavirus relief funds as monies are set to expire on Dec. 31. For months Brown has urged Congress to immediately reinstitute the \$600 supplemental benefit for unemployment and

enhance federal employment compensation.

“2020 has challenged Oregon in unimaginable ways. We have been tested to the core, and the most vital needs of Oregon families — health, safety, education, housing, and the ability to learn a living — have all been challenged in new ways,” Brown said.

Brown said not everyone would be happy with the budget.

“The pandemic has led to a state budget shortfall that will require not only scrapping plans for long-needed investments, but also making small but difficult cuts in services and programs that affect Oregonians’ lives daily,” the

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AP photo

Gov. Kate Brown unveiled a highly-aspirational two-year state budget proposal Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020, that would require a politically supportive U.S. Congress to make much of its most sweeping — and expensive — programs to work.

BY THE NUMBERS

- Gov. Kate Brown’s 2021-2023 proposed budget includes the following:
- \$100.2 billion in total spending, including \$25.6 billion in general and lottery funds.
 - \$9.1 billion for main school fund.
 - \$189.5 million to rebuild communities impacted by the fires.
 - Calls for federal funds for COVID-19 testing, health services, rent forgiveness, targeted mortgage relief and more
 - Calls for reforms in the justice system.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
21 Low
Clear and cold



Friday
40/22
Mostly sunny

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



SATURDAY

EOU’S STADIUM UPGRADE

Online at lagrandeobserver.com